

College Athletics: Finding the Right Balance

Issue:

Ideally, athletics programs provide discipline, instill the value of teamwork in the athletes, and bring a sense of pride and camaraderie to faculty, students, and alumni. But critics claim that college sports have become too commercialized and too detached from the academic mission of the university, and that recent scandals have helped dampen public trust in postsecondary education. Starting with the Knight Commission in the 1980s, several groups have called for more closely aligning athletics with academics and focusing on athletes' well being.

Best Practices:

So what can you, as a trustee or regent, do to address the perceived disconnect between athletics and academics? In 2004, the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) adopted a *Statement on Board Responsibilities for Intercollegiate Athletics* focusing on eight areas of responsibility.

- General Oversight – Boards should know about the impact of intercollegiate sports on admissions, social life, academics, and fan conduct.
- Presidential Authority – Boards should formally delegate responsibility for athletics programs to the university president and hold him or her responsible for the conduct of the athletics programs.
- Athletics Department Mission – Boards should require that athletics programs have mission statements that are aligned with the university's mission statement. There should be accountability standards that address finance, admissions, advising, and other issues.
- Fiscal Responsibility – Athletics budgets should be evaluated as part of the regular budgeting process. Boards should understand the extent to which the university's general budget does or does not subsidize the athletics budget.
- Academics and Student-Athlete Welfare – Boards should encourage faculty to address academic, student welfare, and institutional reputation issues. Admissions policies for student-athletes should not adversely impact the academic mission or the culture of the campus. Academic support services for student-athletes should not be separated from general academic support services.
- Compliance – Boards should make sure that programs comply with NCAA regulations and Title IX requirements.
- Personnel – Board members should not be directly involved in hiring or firing athletics personnel. Boards should hold athletics personnel responsible for student-athletes' academic performance.
- Communication and Information Flow – Boards should require unfiltered data dealing with admissions, finance, graduation rates, and other issues related to athletics.

Resources:

- Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges. *Statement on Board Responsibilities for Intercollegiate Athletics*. Washington, D.C.: AGB, 2004.
- NCAA Academic Support Services and Resources (www.ncaa.org).
- The Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics (www.neuro.uoregon.edu/~tublitz/COIA).
- The Drake Group (www.thedrakegroup.org).
- The Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics (www.knightcommission.org).
- Walda, John D. "Moving College Sports from Maelstrom to Mainstream." *Trusteeship*, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 14-17, March/April 2001.